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Activity Guide

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Countdown to Kindergarten

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ABOUT THE STORY

A five-year-old has ten days until she starts kindergarten, and she's in trouble: she doesn't know how to tie her shoes. She is certain that everyone in kindergarten must know how to tie their shoes; it's a rule. She tries and tries — her father teaches her, her mother teaches her, she practices on her own. As the fateful day nears, she still can't tie her laces. What will happen when she gets to school?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alison McGhee grew up in the Adirondack Mountains of New York. She has written novels, poetry, and essays. She now lives with her family in Minneapolis, where she teaches creative writing at Metro State University. She has a terrible fear of headstands.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Harry Bliss is a cartoonist and artist for *Archeology* magazine and *The New Yorker*. He has illustrated several other children's books, including *Diary of a Worm* and *A Fine, Fine School*, also available as Live Oak Media Readalongs, and narrated by Mr. Bliss. He lives in Burlington, Vermont.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask children whether they were fearful of starting kindergarten. Have volunteers describe their fears on starting school. Explain that the book they will read is about a girl who thinks that all kindergarteners except her know how to tie their shoes.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- “What rules does the girl think kindergarten has?”
- “Why is the girl so afraid of starting kindergarten?”
- “What does the girl do with her shoes?”
- “What happens when the girl finally gets to school?”
- “How do you think the girl feels at the end of the book?” (*Make Inferences*)
- “Do you think the girl will ever learn to tie her shoelaces? Why or why not?” (*Make Predictions*)

Vocabulary

Write these words and sentences on the chalkboard. Have children copy the sentences, filling in the blanks with the word that fits best.

velcro practices canoe celebrate

- The girl _____tying her shoelaces over and over again.
- At bathtime, the girl gives her rubber duck a ride in a _____ made of a shoe.
- The family goes out to dinner to _____the start of kindergarten.
- The girl fears she will have to wear shoes that fasten with _____.

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Health: A Celebration Dinner

The girl in the story eats her favorite dinner, spaghetti, to celebrate starting kindergarten. Have children write down the menu that they would request if they were going to a similar celebration dinner. Children can compare their menus when they are finished.

Language Arts: The Biggest Challenge

Have children think of a challenge they faced when starting school similar to the girl's challenge of tying her shoelaces. Ask them to write a description of their challenge and how they faced it. Volunteers can share their descriptions with the class.

Art: A Shoe-Tying Poster

As children know, learning to tie shoelaces is very difficult. Have them work in pairs to make a poster showing step-by-step instructions for this task. Provide poster board for pairs. Be sure they break the job down into easy-to-follow steps. Remind them to use time order words in their instructions, such as first, next, then, and finally. Children can include illustrations of the steps in the process. Distribute posters to the school's kindergarten classes, if possible.

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to be sure the sites are suitable.

Tying the Knot

Children can learn about how to tie different types of knots by searching the Internet with the keywords *tying knots*. Have them find a kind of knot they can tie and practice following the instructions for tying it. Children can copy or print out the knot-tying instructions and demonstrate the knot to the class.